

Iraq Situation Report: February 12 - 17, 2016

1 KRG challenges PM Abadi to meet oil-for-salaries proposal. The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) announced on February 17 that it would accept an oil-for-salaries plan proposed by PM Abadi on February 16, wherein the KRG delivers oil to Baghdad in exchange for salary payments for 1.4 million KRG employees. The KRG stated that it needed 890 trillion dinars (~\$804 million) per month to pay for salaries. The statement also claimed that PM Abadi likely did not make the proposal in good faith, and that he had not mentioned the proposal when a KRG delegation last visited Baghdad.

2 ISIS targets Peshmerga near Mosul. Peshmerga and tribal fighters with Coalition air support repelled an ISIS attack comprised of two Vehicle-borne Improvised Explosive Devices (VBIEDs) in Gwer south of Mosul on February 16

3 ISF continue to arrive in northern Iraq for Mosul-area operations. A third batch of Iraqi Army (IA) forces primarily from the 15th IA Division arrived at the IA base in Makhmur, southwest of Arbil to participate in operations in the vicinity of Mosul.

4 Tensions between Popular Mobilization and Kurds are exacerbated by kidnappings. The Tuz Khurmatu mayor stated that 11 Kurds, including three members of the presidential guard, who were kidnapped at a Popular Mobilization checkpoint near Amerli on February 12 were freed on February 13, commending a Turkmen Popular Mobilization group for its role in securing their release. The Popular Mobilization dismantled checkpoints on the Baghdad-Kirkuk road on February 15 in response to the kidnappings.

5 Security forces continue clearing the corridor between Ramadi and Baghdad. Security forces and tribal fighters cleared Hamidiyah area, northeast of Ramadi, and encircled the Habaniyah train station in al-Felihat area, east of Ramadi, on February 16.

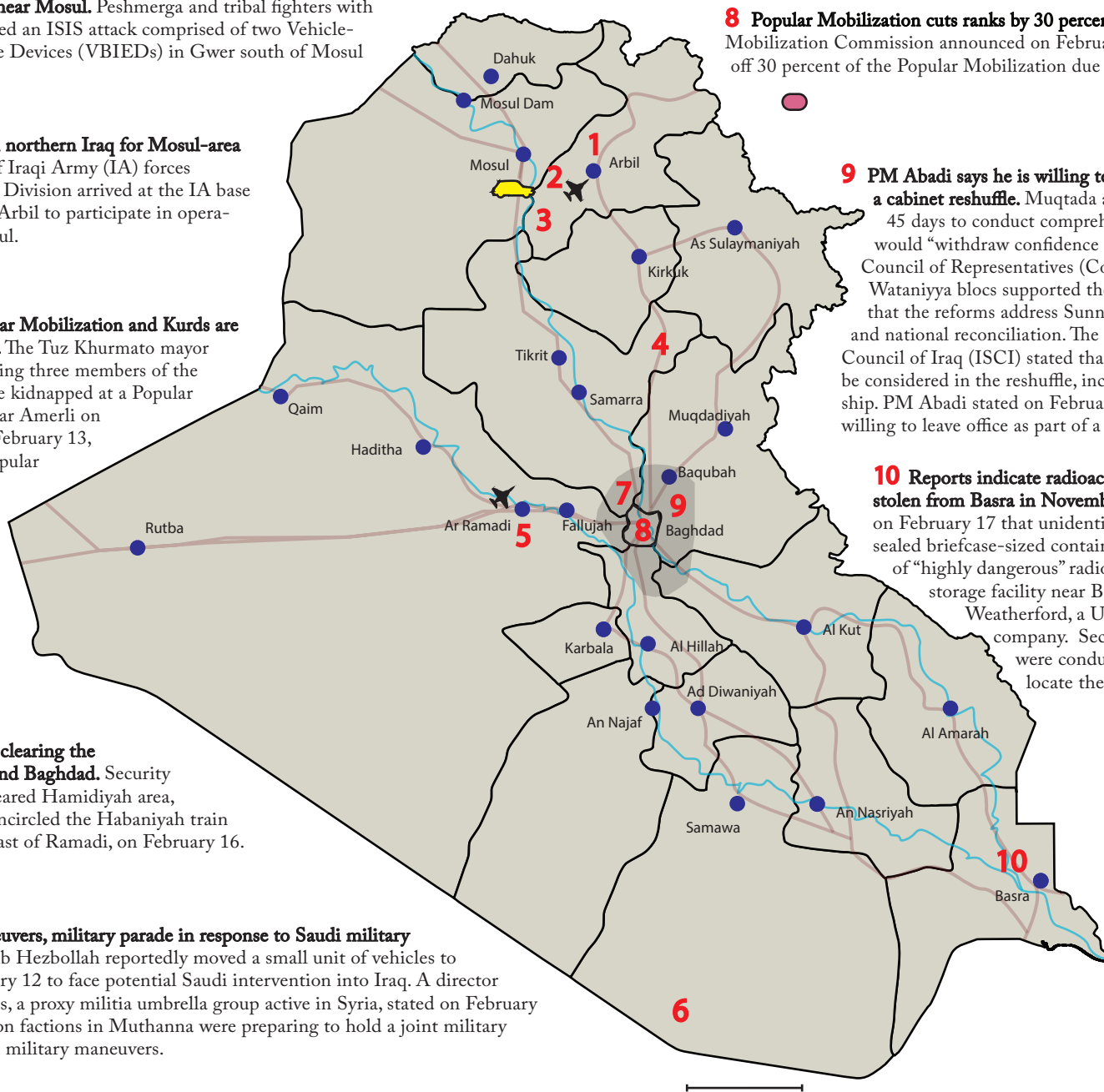
6 Proxy militias plan maneuvers, military parade in response to Saudi military exercises near border. Kata'ib Hezbollah reportedly moved a small unit of vehicles to the Saudi border on February 12 to face potential Saudi intervention into Iraq. A director for Liwa Abu Fadl al-Abbas, a proxy militia umbrella group active in Syria, stated on February 14 that Popular Mobilization factions in Muthanna were preparing to hold a joint military parade in response to Saudi military maneuvers.

7 Kidnapped Americans freed. The State Department confirmed that three American contractors were released on February 16 after being kidnapped in the Doura district of Baghdad on January 15. An anonymous source added that an Iraqi intelligence "special operation" secured the Americans, who were transferred to a U.S. base in Germany, and are "in good condition."

8 Popular Mobilization cuts ranks by 30 percent. The Popular Mobilization Commission announced on February 17 that it was laying off 30 percent of the Popular Mobilization due to financial constraints.

9 PM Abadi says he is willing to leave office as part of a cabinet reshuffle. Muqtada al-Sadr gave PM Abadi 45 days to conduct comprehensive reforms or he would "withdraw confidence from PM Abadi in the Council of Representatives (CoR)." Etitah and Wataniyya blocs supported the reshuffle but insisted that the reforms address Sunni political demands and national reconciliation. The Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) stated that all positions should be considered in the reshuffle, including the premiership. PM Abadi stated on February 15 that he was willing to leave office as part of a cabinet reshuffle.

10 Reports indicate radioactive material was stolen from Basra in November. Reuters reported on February 17 that unidentified assailants stole a sealed briefcase-sized container of up to 10 grams of "highly dangerous" radioactive material from a storage facility near Basra belonging to Weatherford, a U.S. oilfield services company. Security forces in Basra were conducting operations to locate the material.



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Content: Patrick Martin and ISW Iraq Team
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Prime Minister Abadi is facing grave political challenges following his announcement of a cabinet reshuffle on February 9. Supporters of his past reform have stated that all positions should be open for consideration in a government, including that of the prime minister. In addition, Muqtada al-Sadr gave PM Abadi 45 days before he threatened to withdraw his support from PM Abadi's government. Separately, PM Abadi stated that he was willing to resign as part of the reshuffle if necessary. The prime minister does not have the constitutional right or the power to undertake sweeping reforms of the government without support from the political blocs, which bodes ill for his ability to stay in office. PM Abadi's removal would be highly problematic for the U.S.-led anti-ISIS Coalition, as he is a pro-Coalition figure that would likely be replaced by a leader far more willing to accept greater Iranian assistance. Meanwhile, the Popular Mobilization Commission stated that it had cut its ranks by 30 percent due to financial constraints, likely an attempt to access funding from the Iraqi government. Iranian proxy militias secure their funding from Iran and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), but a large number of other militia groups rely on funding from the Iraqi government, though they may also be competing for potential access to Iranian resources. If the announced cuts target Sunni tribal fighters in the Popular Mobilization and more nationalist groups not closely tied to Iran, it would make the Popular Mobilization even more difficult to include in future security operations due to their increasingly pro-Iranian slant.